

NURSING THEORIES: NATURE, CHARACTERISTICS, PURPOSES AND USES

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Abstract

Basic to any professional discipline is the development of a body of knowledge that can be applied to its practice. Such knowledge is often expressed in terms of concepts and theories, especially in the area of the behavioral or social sciences. Thus nursing as a young, evolving profession is beginning to develop a body of knowledge in terms of the concepts and theories that support its practice. Concepts represents abstract notions and ideas that, when interrelated, provide the foundation of a theory. Theories may be viewed as visions giving intellectual insight into phenomena, but for maximum significance and impact they should be explanatory and predictive in nature so as to guide professional practice.

Key Words: *Nursing theory, concepts, characteristics.*

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Theories:

Theory is a set of concepts, definitions & propositions that project a systematic view of the phenomenon by designating specific interrelationships among the concepts for the purpose of describing, explaining, predicting and or controlling phenomena. (Chin & Jacobs, 1987)

Components of a theory:

1. Phenomena
 - They are the designation of an aspect of reality.
 - They can be consciously sensed or experienced.
2. Concepts
 - They are the basic building blocks of a theory
 - Concepts are elements of phenomena.
 - They are abstract
 - Derived from the impressions the human mind receives.
3. Propositions
 - They form a logically inter related deductive system
 - They expressions of relational statements between the concepts & among the concepts.
 - It can express as statements, paradigms or figures.
4. Relationship statement
 - It indicates specific relationship between the two or more concepts.
 - A variety of term used such as propositions, hypotheses, laws, axioms.
5. Hypothesis
 - They are tentative suggestions that a specific relationship exists between two concepts or propositions.
 - As the hypothesis is repeatedly confirmed, it progresses to an empirical generalization.
6. Definitions
 - They convey the general meaning of the concepts.
 - Which can either be descriptive or procedural
7. Assumptions
 - They are accepted "truths" that are the basic and fundamental to the theory

Nature of theories:

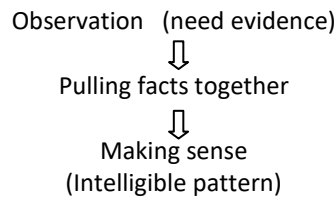
1. They are not discovered
2. They are created and invented
3. Theories as tentative
4. Theory building depends not only on facts and observable evidences, but also on the originator's ingenuity in pulling facts together & making sense of them
5. It has phenomena
6. Today's successful but tomorrow it can be revised or discredited
7. It can be renamed or modified based on new observation or by new evidence
8. They are not totally free from human values
9. They are derived through two principle methods; deductive reasoning and inductive reasoning
10. They are composed of concepts, definitions, models, and propositions & based on assumptions.

Characteristics of a theory:

- Systematic, logical & coherent
- Creative structuring of ideas
- Tentative in nature
- Bases for hypotheses that can be tested
- Consistent with other validated theories, laws & principles but leave open unanswered questions that need to be investigated
- Increasing the body of knowledge within the discipline

The basic points in Theories development:

(Creative thought or intellect idea)



Uses of theory:

- Theory guides and improves nursing practice
- Theory guides in research
- Theory contributes to the development of the disciplines body of knowledge
- Theory enhances communication.

Purposes of nursing theory:

- I. In nursing practice
 - ✓ organize patient data
 - ✓ understand patient data
 - ✓ analyze patient data
 - ✓ make decisions about nursing intervention
 - ✓ plan patient care
 - ✓ predict outcome of care
 - ✓ evaluate patient outcome (Alligood,2001)
- II. In Education
 - ✓ Provide a general focus for curriculum
 - ✓ Guide curricular decision making
- III. In Research
 - ✓ Offer a framework for generating knowledge & new ideas
 - ✓ Assist in discovering knowledge gaps in the specific field of study
 - ✓ Provide a systematic approach to identify questions for study; select variables, interpret findings, and validate nursing interventions
 - ✓ Approaches to developing nursing theory
 - ✓ Inductively looking at nursing practice to discover theories/ concepts to explain phenomena
 - ✓ Deductively looking for the compatibility of a general theory with nursing practice.

Common concepts in nursing theories:

1. Four concepts common in nursing theory that influence and determine nursing practice are
 - The person(patient)
 - The environment
 - Health
 - Nursing (goals, roles, functions)
2. Each of these concepts is usually defined by a nursing theorist

CONCLUSION:

Theory is a “creative and rigorous structuring of ideas that projects a tentative, purposeful, and systematic view of phenomena. ”Thus theories may serve a springboard for advances in knowledge and the accumulation of evidence for practice.

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